

CLAIMS:

1. A method for organizing e-mail messages comprising the steps of:

indicating (101) at least one first e-mail message in a user mailbox;

associating (121) the at least one first e-mail with a second e-mail by enabling

5 an association option; and

forming (125) an associated group in the user mailbox comprising at least two or more associated e-mails.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of associating further comprises the
10 steps of:

enabling (123) an options list to appear with respect to the at least one first e-mail message;

selecting (123) an associate option on the options list; and

15 indicating (125) the second e-mail; wherein the second e-mail is caused to be automatically associated to the at least one first e-mail to form the associated group.

3. The method of claim 2, further comprising the step of providing a show associations (305) and a hide associations option (307) on the options list.

20 4. The method of claim 3, further comprising the step of showing (309) the associated e-mails of a sent e-mail message to a recipient when the show associations option is selected.

5. The method of claim 3, further comprising the step of hiding (309) the associated e-mails of a sent e-mail message from a recipient when the hide associations option
25 is selected.

6. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of providing a collapsability and expandability feature (219, 213) for the associated group.

5 7. The method of claim 6, further comprising the step of providing a first graphical indicator (221, 215) for indicating when the associated group is expanded and a second graphical indicator for indicating when the associated group is collapsed.

8. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of providing e-mail operations
10 for performing on the associated group of e-mails (119, 129).

9. A method for organizing e-mail messages comprising the steps of:

creating a user-defined discussion topic heading (107), said discussion topic heading appearing as an entry in at least one of the user's mailboxes; and

15 associating at least one e-mail message to the discussion topic to form an associated e-mail-to-topic group (111).

10. The method of claim 9, wherein the step of associating further comprises the steps of:

20 enabling (123) an options list to appear with respect to the user-defined discussion topic heading;

selecting (123) an associate option on the options list; and

indicating (125) at least one e-mail message; wherein the at least one e-mail is caused to be automatically associated to the discussion topic heading to form the

associated e-mail-to-topic group.

11. The method of claim 10, further comprising the step of providing a show associations (305) and a hide associations option (307) on the options list.

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12. The method of claim 11, further comprising the step of showing at least one of the discussion topic heading and associated e-mails of a sent e-mail message to a recipient when the show associations option is selected (305).

10 13. The method of claim 11, further comprising the step of hiding at least one of the discussion topic heading and associated e-mails of a sent e-mail message to a recipient when the hide associations option is selected (307).

14. The method of claim 9, further comprising the step of providing a collapsability
15 and expandability feature (213, 219) for the associated e-mail-to-topic group.

15. An e-mail system comprising:

e-mail software for providing e-mail capabilities to a user (101); and

an associate feature (109, 123) for providing e-mail organization capabilities
20 to the user by organizing e-mail messages to form at least one of an associated group of e-mails or an associated e-mail-to-topic group in at least one of the user's mailboxes.

16. The system of claim 15, further comprising an options list with respect to each e-
25 mail message, said options list comprising said associate feature (109, 123).

17. The system of claim 16, wherein the associated group of e-mails is formed by causing the options list to appear with respect to at least one first e-mail message (123), selecting the associate feature from said options list (123), and indicating a second e-mail (125), wherein the second e-mail is caused to be automatically associated to the at least one first e-mail to form the associated group of e-mails.

18. The system of claim 16, wherein the associated e-mail-to-topic group is formed by creating a user-defined discussion topic heading (107), causing the options list to appear with respect to at least one e-mail message, selecting the associate feature from said options list (109), and indicating the discussion topic heading (111), wherein the at least one e-mail is caused to be automatically associated to the discussion topic to form the associated e-mail-to-topic group and said discussion topic heading appears as an additional field in said at least one e-mail message.

19. The system of claim 16, further comprising a show associations feature (305) and a hide associations feature (307) on the options list.

20. The system of claim 15, further comprising an auto-process feature (400) for automatically parsing a received e-mail to search for an existing discussion thread, wherein if an existing discussion thread is found, the received e-mail is automatically associated to the discussion thread.